Exploring Indian Military Industrial Complex

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The modern nation-states have certain core components, including killing machines such as fighter jets, battle tank, and nuclear submarines. Countries maintain armies because it's the state's duty to protect its citizens. In the 20th century, countries started to pursue organized defence research to ensure their military is well equipped and updated as per contemporary requirements. This led to some of the greatest inventions of modern times, notably the Internet, Rockets and even stainless steel.

The process also resulted in the establishment of massive industries making deadly war machines, employing millions and generating billions in sales. Today, the Military-Industrial Complexes (MIC) that emerged is at the heart of the industrialization of most developed and some emerging economies.

India is an exception.

India has the dubious distinction of heading the list of the world's biggest arms importers. Arms imports by India increased by 24% between 2008-2012 and 2013-2017 periods, as per data on International arms transfer released by Global think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (March, 2018). The list also includes undemocratic oil-rich countries in West Asia. India is followed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, China, Australia, Algeria, Iraq, Pakistan, and Indonesia as the World's top arms importer. The largest arms supplier to India from 2013-2017 were Russia (62%), US (15%) and Israel (11%).

India lacks a defence industry of its own sufficient to meet its external challenges and to keep pace with its expanding strategic interests. The need to modernize has indeed been one major reason for India's status as top spender on arms imports. In a panel discussion the government's secretary of defence production Ajay Kumar, said, "India wants to transition of weapons system to an exporte, but still India imports most of its components". So what are the known reasons that India still import arms and failed to establish its own MIC?

India is still struggling to upgrade its arms manufacturing sector, despite this being a priority for over a decade. Continued reliance on foreign suppliers exposes the lack of a clear-cut vision of its defense industry. Humiliating defeat in 1962 Sino India war, and America's refusal to share high tech weapons meant India needed to upgrade its military capability, given the cold war dynamics of the time, Union of soviet socialist republic stepped in, and eventually, Indian Armory was entirely full of Soviet weapons.

Still, Russia continues to be one of India's most important strategic partner, in fact, the biggest arms supplier, but the modernization of India's armed forces continue to take place in a slapdash manner. Despite the rhetoric of "Make in India", India often prioritizes price, awarding contracts to state-owned defense firms that invest little in research and development, **according** to a report from New Delhi's Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. There has been no significant systemic transformation and huge cost and time overruns in domestic defense production are commonplace.

In 2017, the Indian Army rejected an Indian-made **rifle** for the second year in a row after it reportedly failed quality tests. Locally made products like Arjun **tanks**, light combat **aircraft** and even bullet-proof jackets often can't be used on the sensitive China or Pakistan borders because of performance issues. The lack of coordination between the defence forces and defence production organs in the country stymies the development of a domestic defence manufacturing sector. The armed forces have been **regularly accused** of preferring imported products over indigenous ones. Part of the problem is procurement is overseen by "non-expert" generalists of the Indian Administrative Service, said Manoj Joshi, a fellow at the Observer Research Foundation think-tank who was on a government task force recommending national security reforms. "They can't tell you about strategy," he said. "The army, navy and air force are well trained, but their organization is obsolete and their equipment is obsolete."

Since the Cold War, India has tried to increase its arms imports from the US and Western Europe as part of a broader strategy of diversifying suppliers. This works both ways: the US defence industry is very happy to find **new buyers and new technologies**. American defence giants such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing have been exploring potential business partners in India, attracted by the low-cost, well-educated, English speaking and technically sound workforce.

Relying on imports from first tier arms producing countries has positives and negatives. On one hand, it has ensured and enhanced India's defence capability, but on the other, it has constrained indigenous research as technology has been imported rather than developed. Though these arms purchases are done with technology transfer and offset arrangements, India still lags behind the developed countries defence industry standards.

So what are all these arms for? India faces two primary enemies – Pakistan and China – and what worries its government most is the prospect of its two rivals uniting to form a hostile nuclear and defence partnership. In the face of this threat, India feels it still needs to beef up its arms acquisitions to deal with its shortage of fighter jets, submarines, helicopters, howitzers and so on.

Geopolitical factors are also driving India to focus on importing arms. Since the country declared itself a nuclear power in 1998, India's political and defence elites have reached a consensus on the idea that India must march towards great power status. A growing economy further supports the focus on beefing up its defence as does the "push factor" of Chinese rivalry and the "pull" of the US' rebalancing strategy towards Asia-Pacific.

Experts suggest India could resolve some issues by appointing a single person in charge of the armed forces, or outline priorities in a national security doctrine. “One of the bigger problems is the lack of overarching political direction in terms of how to prepare and what to prepare for,” These are some of the factors, that despite the Indian, specifically Modi’s, rhetoric of “Indigenization” India lacks a Military industrial complex and still import weapons.